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ABSTRACT

A study of distinctive characteristics of the style in which people communicate in computer-mediated communication (CMC), focusing on use of politeness conventions, is reported. Aspects of the concept of "face" and politeness in social interaction are first reviewed, and threats to speaker's and hearer's face are outlined. The relationship of politeness strategies, face-threatening acts (FTAs), and intentions is then examined. Previous research on politeness and discourse and on communication dynamics in electronic media are reviewed. The study itself is then detailed. Data were drawn from CMC on a bulletin board system (BBS) discussion, carried on over 10 weeks, on the topic of censorship on the BBS. Analysis of the communications was based on theory of politeness, with specific regard to FTAs. Results indicate that FTAs were a frequent feature of this topic, and that the social roles apparent to interlocutors in the outside environment were significantly altered in CMC. Discussion of the findings focuses largely on the role of the environment or the overall BBS community in the frequency of FTAs. It is also argued that examination of CMC can shed light on patterns in various communication factors, such as turn-taking and prosody. Contains 58 references. (MSE)

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Politeness Theory in Computer Mediated Communication: Face Threatening Acts in a 'Faceless' Medium

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Politeness Theory in Computer Mediated Communication: Face Threatening Acts in a 'Faceless' Medium

ABSTRACT

The growing use of computer mediated communications (communication between subjects via computer, a.k.a. CMC) have reportedly evinced some distinct characteristics in the style in which people communicate in this medium which takes place in the electronic dimension referred to as *cyberspace*. Using real time (synchronous) conversation or delayed time (asynchronous) Email (electronic mail) to individuals or groups, participants in international and local bulletin board systems (BBS) in classrooms, industrial and other settings have shown a diminished or altered regard for the normal conventions of politeness usually evident in other written types of communications (letters, faxes, etc.) and face to face or voice only conversations. While most of the investigations to date have dealt with the technological and commercial advantages of the CMC, there are a growing number of investigators who are applying sociolinguistic, and ethnographical approaches to the investigation of the medium. Many of these investigations have purportedly shown that CMC is remarkable for the frequent and extreme verbal aggression and self-disclosure of the participants. As a result of the growing importance of CMC and the marked tendency people have in interacting differently from normal conventions of politeness, this area of investigation is quickly becoming a major concern for sociologists, industrial psychologists and applied linguists. This article will give an overview of the related research to date, trends that have been observed and an analysis of a CMC BBS topic (a forum reserved primarily for a certain issue) that involved a number of computer literate, predominantly native speakers of English over a 10 week period. This particular BBS topic was initiated to invite response to censorship (a universally touchy subject) on the BBS investigated in this article. It is primarily analysed within the framework of Brown and Levinson's work (1987) in the universal aspects of politeness and specifically with respect to face threatening acts (FTAs). FTAs were a frequent feature of this BBS topic and a considerable amount of this paper is focused on the environment or the overall BBS community in the investigation of the underlying reasons for the frequent FTAs. It is also argued that this medium of communication is significant for the light it sheds on the influence of various factors involved in the act of communication (turn-taking, prosody and kinesics etc.) that is evident when these factors are diminished or absent.

INTRODUCTION

A Universal and Fundamental Theory of Social Interaction

Politeness, i. e., acting so as to take account of the feelings of others, is achieved through verbal strategies. The selection of verbal strategies is governed by the degree of estimated risk of face loss. Face is the wish to be unimpeded or free from imposition (Brown, 1990). Politeness, arising out of interaction as a kind of implicit agreement to respect one another's face, is not a stimulus-response phenomenon but a system of planned strategies governed by desired goals and estimated risk to face.

Brown and Levinson's investigations into politeness have led to the theory that politeness shows some universal characteristics evident in many different cultures. They have also observed that it is a fundamental aspect of discourse. Gumperz (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. xiii) goes so far as to place the Theory of Politeness in the foundations of human societies by proposing that Politeness is basic to the production of social order and a precondition of human cooperation. Societies everywhere manifest these underlying politeness principles with context-specific variations. Brown (1990) offers the Theory of Politeness as an example of the kind of human invariant arising out of the interaction discussed by Solomon Asch in his "Social Psychology" (1952, cited in Brown, 1990). Fasold concurs by stating that Brown and Levinson's theory is an attempt: "to develop an explicit model of politeness which will have validity across cultures" (Fasold, 1990, p. 160)

As a universal theory, this particular attempt to explain politeness diverges from the normative or rule-based approaches postulated by others. It has the advantage of avoiding culture specific context and arbitrary rules that tend to invent problems to be explained rather than explaining problems. In Politeness Theory, the rules are meant to be discovered rather than imposed and can be investigated in light of their underlying reasons (Fasold, 1990, p. 161).

A REVIEW OF ASPECTS OF FACE AND POLITENESS

The Central Role of 'Face' in Politeness

The concept of 'face' forms the core of Politeness Theory and plays a pivotal role in its analysis. Face is an element of the human psyche that all competent adult members of a society presumably have (and know each other to have). 'Face', which is the public self-image that every member wants to claim for themselves, consists of two related aspects:

(a) negative face[1]: The basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction - i.e. freedom of action and self-determination and freedom from imposition.

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[1] In Brown and Levinson's analysis, the notions and labels for positive and negative face derive ultimately from Durkheim's positive and negative rites' (in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1915), with some influence from Goffman.

(b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' claimed by interactants including the crucial aspects of wants, values and the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of by others.

These two categories describe what Brown and Levinson assert are universal and *general* principles rather than specifically true of any particular societies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 61-64).

Face Threatening Acts

There are a number of ways that a person's face (positive or negative) can be threatened; ways that can be mitigated or exacerbated by a multitude of factors including the immediate environment, the primary participants, observers, formality, the relative power one participant has over another, the physical and emotional distance of the participants; a multitude of factors that act upon the underlying principles and produce a vast number of variations. There are, to put it simply, threats to the speaker or hearer's positive face wherein one indicates a low regard for the other's goods, values, feelings, status and wants in general and there are threats to the speaker or hearer's negative face wherein one indicates no intention of avoiding imposition on the speaker of hearer's freedom of action.

Types of FTAs

Brown and Levinson have elucidated four types of face threatening acts (FTAs) (1987, pp. 65-68) reprinted here in abbreviated form.

TABLE 1. Types of FTAs

Threats to Hearer's (H) Face:

Threats to H's positive face:

i) **S disapproves of H's face:**

(a) disapproval, criticism, insults, etc.

(b) contradictions, disagreements, etc.

ii) **S is indifferent to H's face:**

(a) expressions of violent emotions

(b) inappropriate topics

(c) boasting, bad news

(d) raising divisive or provocative topics

(e) non-cooperation, interruptions, etc.

(f) inappropriate use of address terms

Threats to H's negative face:

i) **H acts in response to S's:**

(a) orders and requests

(b) suggestions, advice

(c) threats, warnings, dares

ii) **S acts by making:**

(a) offers requiring acceptance

(b) promises

iii) **H reacts to S's:**

(a) compliments, envy, admiration

(b) anger, hatred, lust

Threat's to Speaker's (S) Face:

Threats to S's positive face:

(a) apologies: admission of prior FTA

(b) acceptance of a compliment

(c) loss of bodily control

(d) outwards signs of embarrassment

(e) admissions of guilt or responsibility for inappropriate acts or ignorance

(f) uncontrolled emotion

Threats to S's negative face:

(a) expressing thanks: accepts debt to H

(b) acceptance of H's thanks or apology

(c) excuses for acts criticised by H which may in turn be criticisms of H

(d) acceptance of offers that may encroach on H's negative face

(e) response to *faux pas:* to ignore the *faux pas* may threaten S's negative face, to notice may threaten H's positive face

Rational Processes

Another premise of Brown and Levinson's analysis is the assumption that all adults have consistent modes of reasoning that will allow them to achieve their desired objectives (1987, pp. 64-65). In other words, rational adults can perceive a desirable goal and then figure out the way to go about achieving that goal. The property of adulthood would seem to be essential since it takes experience to carry out the task of identifying the desired end, deciding what to do to gain that end and then executing the act to acquire the desired result. The ability to reason and act is directly involved in maintaining or dealing with face. The concept of face requires that society embodies these reasoning processes and rational adults are mindful of them.

Determining FTAs

1. The Cooperative Principal

Grice provided an overall principle that gives us the framework for investigating politeness. This primary principle of cooperation is essentially as follows: make your contribution as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged (Levinson, 1983, p. 101)

2. Underlying Maxims

In ascertaining face threatening acts, the fundamental place to start is with Grice's Maxims (Grice, H. P., 1975. Cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 94-95) which function within the Cooperative Principle. These maxims provide guidelines for maximally efficient communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 95) They are briefly:

Quality:	non-spurious--tell the truth and avoid unsubstantiated rumour
Quantity:	succinct--give no more and no less information than is required
Relevance:	relevant--stick to the topic
Manner:	perspicuous--be straightforward, brief and orderly

These maxim's are not upheld in conversations as a matter of routine, in fact they are usually avoided to some extent. Deviating from the maxims is the essence of politeness. Totally efficient communication is usually very impolite. Employing the maxim's to their fullest, i. e. going **BALD ON RECORD**, (abbreviated BOR) is what often constitutes a FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 94). Direct imperatives, for example, are a strict form of BOR.

3. Contextual demands that override face concerns

For a BOR to be a face threatening act, the listener must perceive it as such regardless of the speaker's intentions. For example, implied threats may not be inferred by the listener. When, to give another example, imperative orders are normal, even expected, BOR may not necessarily constitute an FTA. There are, in other words, situations where face is irrelevant or unimportant (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 95-98). The following are situations wherein FTAs are not minimised, i. e. not redressed or mitigated:

1. Maximum efficiency is required by speaker and hearer:

a) urgency in the presence of danger or other pressing matters and redress would diminish the sense of urgency;

b) metaphorical urgency for emphasis (e. g. attention getters: phrases used to introduce ideas into a conversation, etc.);

c) imperatives in formulaic entreaties that show regard for the hearer;
d) task oriented discourse and instructions needing a minimum of prose;
e) interference in communication requiring economy of wording. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 95-98).

Of these concerns, the three most applicable in CMC would be metaphorical urgency (a fairly common discourse strategy that is also found in CMC), formulaic entreaties (not readily noted in this study except in that they occasionally preceded requests for information), and task oriented discourse. This last is no surprise because, as noted by Chesebro and Bonsall (1989), the use of CMC for teleconferencing tends to evolve toward task oriented uses. As for (a) and (d), in this study there was never any danger or communication interference that affected the interaction[2].

2. The speaker deliberately shows disregard for the hearer's face:
a) the speaker does not fear retaliation or non-cooperation;
b) the speaker has a low regard for the hearer's face or the speaker wants to insult the hearer;
c) the hearer is operating within humorous parameters (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 97).

This is the area which best addresses the FTAs in CMC outside of an institution that lacks the pressure of a governing hierarchy. The lack of normal discourse clues (tone of voice, expression, etc.) and the normal concern for another person's feelings that would be a reaction to a 'real person' with a 'real face' are severely depleted in this environment where people communicate with disembodied words. For this reason, assigning a lack of respect or a low regard for the hearer needs to be qualified to include:

d) the speaker is not fully cognisant of the implications of the content or wording in the absence of normal discourse clues;

3. FTAs are in the hearer's interest: the speaker conveys concern for the hearer:
a) advice or warnings,
b) giving comfort,
c) granting permission for requests from the hearer,
d) clichés (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 98).

While these seem fairly straightforward, they are not easily discernible in CMC since it is

[2] There was a brief episode in which threats were made over the phone, but the communicants did not feel, in retrospect, that the perceived danger had more than a short term urgency about it.

often difficult to tell if FTAs are in anyone's interests. In the environment studied in this paper, there was so much irony and sarcasm during the conflict that took place over a period of three years that it would be necessary to go rather far out on a limb to say when advice, warnings or comfort were being given. Clichés were the normal part of the interchange that showed disregard for the others' face and would not qualify as 'in the hearer's interest'. The granting of permission was a development in the final stages of the conflict when a central authority began to form or exert itself. Even then, some of the requests made to the systems operator (the technician in charge) for services were so sarcastic that he had to either respond with overstated politeness to mitigate the acrimony or respond in private communications out of the public eye.

Politeness Strategies, Face Threatening Acts and Intentions

Politeness strategies are literally attempts at being polite by paying attention to another person's positive or negative face. Strategies may be used alone for various reasons or they may be used with a FTA to lessen the effect of the FTA. There are three primary categories of strategies delineated by Brown and Levinson: positive, negative and off record. These strategies may also be mixed resulting in hybrid that are positive and negative (1987, pp. 230-231).

1. Positive Politeness Strategies (familiar, joking behaviour)

These do not necessarily redress or mitigate FTAs (whereas negative politeness does). They may differ from everyday intimate language only in that they have an element of exaggeration (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 101-129).

TABLE 2. Positive FTA On Record with Redress

Claim Common Ground

Convey something of H's is admirable or interesting

1. Notice/attend H's interests
2. Exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy
3. Intensify interest to H

Claim group membership

4. In-group identification markers

Claim common views, concerns &knowledge

5. Seek agreement
6. Avoid disagreement
7. Assume common ground
8. Joke

Convey Cooperation

Indicate knowledge & accounting for H's concern's

9. Assert or presuppose knowledge & concern for wants

Claim reflexivity: S wants H's wants & H wants S's wants

10. Offer, promise
11. Be optimistic
12. Include S & H in action
13. Give/ask for reasons

Claim reciprocity

14. Assume or assert mutual aims

Fulfill H's Wants

15. Give goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation

2. Negative Politeness Strategies (avoidance behaviour)

These strategies are used to redress specific face wants whereas positive politeness can be used to redress positive face aspects in general. Conventional indirectness or deference are the common linguistic realisations for negative politeness[3]. With negative politeness strategies, the FTA may be committed (a) on record by being direct or it may be done (b) with redress (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 129-211). The manner of redress is outlined in table 3.

TABLE 3. Negative politeness strategies: FTA with redress

Make No Presumption

Minimal assumptions

1. Be conventionally indirect
2. Question, hedge

Use No Coercion

Give option not to act or assume no action on part of hearer

3. Be pessimistic

Minimise threat with explicit distance, power & risk

4. Minimise imposition
5. Give deference

Imply No Challenge or Criticism

6. Apologise

Dissociate S, H from infringement

[3] These are considered to be the most common type of western politeness strategy.

7. Avoid personal pronouns
8. State FTA as a general rule that applies to everyone
9. Nominalise

Redress other wants

5. Give Deference (cf. #5)
10. Go on record as incurring debt or not indebting H

3. Off Record Politeness Strategies

Committing FTAs indirectly involves many of the easily recognised rhetorical devices. They are fairly straightforward violations of Grice's Maxims (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 211-227).

TABLE 4 Off record strategies

Invite conversational implicature, via hints triggered by violation of maxims

Violate Relevance Maxim

1. Give hints (motives, conditions)
2. Give associating clues
3. Presuppose

Violate Quantity Maxim

4. Understate
5. Overstate
6. Use tautologies

Violate Quality Maxim

7. Use contradictions
8. Be ironic
9. Use metaphors
10. Use rhetorical questions

Be vague or ambiguous

Violate Manner Maxim

11. Be ambiguous
12. Be vague
13. Over-generalise
14. Displace H
15. Be incomplete, use ellipsis

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Computer mediated communication (CMC) in the context of this study refers to the participatory or interactive communication that takes place between two or more people using different computers and a telephone link that allows them to write each other with electronic equipment (a cable link or phone modem) that places the written words on a distant computer screen (monitor). It does not include but may be influenced by teletext or videotext systems that provide viewers with information via computer modem or computer cable, electronic newspapers and encyclopaedias (Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989, chapter 4). Interactants are people who may be profoundly effected by the medium (Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989, pp. 137-149) but who engage in the interaction ostensibly to communicate with other people.

The concern in the literature for the social impact of CMC is evident from the broad spectrum of the numerous investigations into the topics of sociological and psychological considerations. The ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center, U. S. Dept. of Education) files revealed 141 articles on CMC that dealt predominantly with the social impact of CMC. All of the American Psychological Association files (APA) and the few PDA files (Proquest Dissertation Abstracts, University Microfilms Inc.) were devoted respectively to behavioural concerns, and the impact of CMC on classroom and social parameters of communication, e. g., stress (Cook, 1987, pp. 329-355), aggression (Lea, O'Shea, Fung, & Spears, 1992, pp. 89-112), the reciprocal effects of CMC behaviour on its social context (Fulk, Schmitz & Schwarz, 1992, p. 7-29), breakdowns and repairs in CMC and the acquisitions of new behaviour (Sharples, 1993), the negative effects that anthropomorphising computers has on CMC (Perse, et al. 1992, p. 161-170), similarities between the construction of social relationships in and outside of CMC (Hellerstein, 1989), the hybrid nature of communication distinctive to CMC (Ogan, 1993), audience response and communication behaviour (Allen, 1993), and the relational perspective of interpersonal effects that CMC has on users (Walther, 1992).

But the actual investigation into the theory of politeness in the context of computer mediated communication is apparently not well developed at the time of writing. In fact, the bulk of the literature delves into the commercial advantages of Email within commercial and academic institutions and international bulletin boards and subjective aspects of human interaction with computers (Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989. pp. 141-42). A search of the APA journal, book and abstract files revealed no articles registered between 1987 and 1993 relating CMC and politeness theory. The ERIC files (current till 1993) revealed only six articles on FTAs and only one of which that dealt with CMC (Kim & Raja, 1991). The PDA (1886-1993) produced none on FTAs or Politeness Theory.

An Emphasis on the Global Perspective

The actual speech acts in CMC are largely neglected in the literature or dealt with in a very general overview; in-depth analysis is still a rare approach. Chesebro and Bonsall--praised as a leading text in sociological studies of CMC (Rafaeli, 1990, pp. 152-55; Santoro, 1991, pp. 294-95; Stephen, 1991, pp. 234-36) pay scant to attention to distortions in normal communication behaviour in cyberspace itself and focus on global issues. There is a short discussion of antisocial behaviour focused on the tendency of children to withdraw into computer games and the observations made by some investigators that computer games enhanced male bonding (Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989, pp. 143-44). They make a brief mention of the false sense of empowerment that comes from mastering the 'technical' demands of computers while the subjects have failed to participate in the social control of technology (1989, pp. 169-171). They also note investigations into obsessive behaviour and computerphobia (1989, pp. 215-20) but these are primarily concerned with the computer users' behaviour outside cyberspace. It is a bit of a puzzle that Chesebro and Bonsall do not address the issues of aggression or abusive interaction that are allegedly widespread.

Characteristics of BBS Discourse

1. Quote and comment format

The mode of communicating in the bulletin board in this study is similar to others in that coherent exchanges are reinforced by the means of persistently quoting other participants with added comments made by the writer. Since it is relatively easy to copy whole sections of text and since there can be very long gaps in time between comments, the participants used a lot of text space on placing each other's words in their text and then commenting about them to keep their text coherent. In this way, quoting has become an outstanding aspect of many BBSs internationally. This is a distinctive aspect provided by the technology that allows the 'reconstruction' of another person's discourse from the stored information to be openly manipulated allowing full control of such things as the content and turn-taking. [4]

Listservers may store all information generated by their immediate subscribers or any other interactants. The discourse in the particular BBS/listserver in this study has been preserved since it began more than five years ago. The interactants (and those who merely read) can download and store these texts for as long as they wish. This also provides a means to commit FTAs since it is possible make another 'eat their words' as it were--history is preserved verbatim and mistakes or discrepancies are there for all to peruse at their leisure.

2. Licenses

Language is used to accomplish goals that can be very compelling (Nofsinger, 1991, p. 6,

[4] This BBS feature, apparently a kind of contrived dyadic alternation, is worthy of research in and of itself but is beyond the scope of this paper.

cited in Todman et al., 1994, p. 49). So much so that people will venture forth to expose themselves to criticism--face threatening acts--just to be part of a community or to be informed about what is going on. The ability of a person to engage in and contribute to a discussion in order to satisfy social desires and a desire to stay informed may be (in their view) limited so they declare the limits of knowledge they have on a topic--a license; they openly adjust to personal insufficiencies in their ability to contribute to the topic of discussion (Prutting & Kirchener, 1983, cited in Todman et al., 1994, p. 49). In this way a small self-imposed threat to one's own face can be made to prevent a riskier FTA that could be made by someone else later. These licenses (Mura, 1983, in Todman, 1994, p. 50) allow entry into a topic without the burden of expert opinion that may invite a challenge by another participant. In fact, intuitively it seems that by stating the license it becomes possible to challenge another participant while maintaining a zone of relative safety around the challenger. The speaker can 'play dumb' and hedge by understating his or her knowledge on a given topic--a violation of the Maxim of Quality to save the speaker's positive face. A participant may say, for example, "I haven't read Greenspan in years. Perhaps you can explain the current federal deficit relative to the money supply?". In this way, the hearer is actually being invited to hold forth and run the risk of being subjected to criticism[5]. Licenses may also hide rhetorical questions which violate the Maxim of Quality in that they are not sincerely statements of the limits of one's ability to contribute to the discussion. In other words, these licenses may enable the initiator to set up a FTA if the receiver can not meet the initiator's criteria of expertise--a common ploy in this BBS topic.

When a challenge is issued, the challenged party must answer skillfully, displaying knowledge of the subject or decline the engagement and suffer lose of face or give a witty retort. On a BBS, the 'expert' comments made by those who rise to the challenge then become a permanent record that may be challenged at leisure. In this way, the means to maintaining coherence interchanges through the quote and comment format becomes the means of initiating a FTA. Any participant may go and read up on the issue and continue the challenge until the primary 'expert' prevails or backs off.

3. Repairs

Conversational breakdowns in face-to-face situations offer opportunities for misunderstanding and the chances to repair interruptions, inappropriate responses, misunderstood contributions and the like (Nofsinger, 1991, pp. 111-144, cited in Todman et al., 1994, pp. 50). In a 'faceless' medium such as the CMC, certain types of breakdown such as garbled speech, stuttering, long uncomfortable pauses or confused reasoning are either

[5] This is known in the vernacular as 'giving some one enough rope to hang themselves' or as one popular nomenclature in the 60's referred to it -- 'NIGYYSOB': 'now I got you, you son of a bitch' a term which also accurately conveys the emotional content of the tactic.

impossible to commit in or they may be eliminated by typing off line and then revising before posting. However, even when people type on-line and make mistakes in syntax or spelling, etc., it is usually overlooked--the number of typos in CMC are remarkable to the novice but are usually ignored after a initial exposure to the medium.

4. Corrections

In this study, there was little chance to look comprehensively into the phenomena of self-correction or other-correction (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977). It was noted, however, that occasionally someone will post an amendment to an earlier posting with some short apology. Questions of clarification are asked at leisure and dealt with at leisure. Such breakdowns rarely cause problems and they did not seem to be an issue in this conflict. Self-correction, apparently, was usually done off-line before things were posted and mistakes made on line did not seem to bother anyone.

5. Turn-taking

Turn-taking is another altered aspect of CMC. It is difficult to interrupt another person unless the bulletin board system has the ability to let people talk to each other in 'real time' in which case the ability to interrupt becomes much more acute than in the face-to-face situation[6]. On this particular BBS, participants have the ability to turn off the real time function so that no one can interrupt them. Nevertheless, this sort of precaution was not necessary during the course of the interchange from early June to late August. This particular social parameter was consistently upheld.

John Gilman[7] (personal communication, 1994, March) has pointed out that his experience in Email communication in the U. S. A. shows that interruptions are not a problem, one need not worry about disturbing some else. When people go to open their Email, they have set aside that time to do just that and communication is done when it is convenient for the interactants. Additionally, I would add that the length of the turn taken by the interactants need not be a matter of concern--people usually read faster than they hear, distill what they want from the text (and reread at leisure) and then choose to react, or not, whenever they wish.

Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974, cited in Levinson, 1983, pp. 296-303), have elucidated a possible mechanism for turn taking to explain the fact that very little overlap actually takes place in a conversation. However, the actual physical nature of CMC demonstrably changes the need for a similar mechanism. Arguments asserting that 'local turn-by-turn organisation' (Sacks et al., 1974 cited in Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 232-33)

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[6] The process of interrupting takes places if one is on-line. While typing away at the keyboard, a message is inserted onto your screen without any warning that it is coming, right in the middle of what you are doing.

[7] An attorney in Kansas City who has accumulated extensive experience in CMC in preparing his cases.

and overall conversation structure (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, cited in Brown & Levinson 1987, p. 232) are crucial in the pragmatic aspects of language may need some revision for CMC.

6. Implicature and Repairs

Implicature--implied information to put it simply--provides information in a discourse community that makes an exchange predictable (Levinson, 1983, pp. 97-166). Implicature refers to the feature of communication that deals with the fact that what is stated literally and what is actually meant is not necessarily the same thing, so a predictable schema will help keep a conversation coherent. R. Lakoff (1973, cited in Levinson, 1983, p. 98) and Smith and Wilson (1979, p. 172ff) give discussions of examples of this feature. Smith and Wilson say an utterance could be analysed as conveying two different types of information:

(a) Propositions deducible from purely linguistic (semantic) rules.

(b) Additional deducible propositions together with some item(s) shared by speaker and hearer, and a set of shared inference rules (Smith & Wilson, 1979, p. 173-74)

They are referring to Paul Grice's lectures in the late 1960s in pointing out that the implicature, deduced from shared background information, is a function of the hearer's perception of what has been said (Smith & Wilson, 1979, p. 175). Mistaken inferences, e. g. reading insults where none is really intended, is a focal point of inappropriate responses in many cases of conflict in BBS communities. Although, arguably some people insist on conflict at every turn (Deutsch, 1992) and deliberately read insults into the exchanges--apparently the case with some of the participants in this BBS.

Electronic Interface, Communication Dynamics and the Context of Cyberspace

Now that we have some idea as to the concepts behind politeness and discourse, we can take a look at the specific nature of CMC discourse and its effects on communication styles and behaviours. Timothy Stephen (1991) provides a working definition of the field of research in CMC as it is commonly understood in the social sciences:

> the study in which the ways in which the computer as a communication medium may influence social/psychological processes occurring between human communicators. Today's CMC research analyzes new social practices (for example, computer conferencing) enabled by institutional, national or global computer communication networks and the consequences of various characteristics of communication that occur uniquely or more frequently in this context (e. g. anonymous exchange, asynchronous interaction, exclusive reliance on written messages, etc.) (p. 236)

Chesebro and Bonsall have made some important points concerning the nature of the human-technological interface that may be germane to this discussion. The process of writing may be enhanced via word processing in a way that has implications for people who

write in CMC on-line and off-line. Sekuler (1985) cites the work of Flower and Hayes (1981)[8] who have concluded from their studies that good writers seldom engage in detailed mental planning before writing and often do not know precisely what they will write until they have done so (Sekuler, 1985, p. 42, cited in Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989, p. 146). From this, Sekuler hypothesised from the work of Flower and Hayes that the word processor makes it easier to discover what we think since the process of producing and modifying what we write is much easier. Additionally, this conceivably has more significance in studying those who compose on- line and may give insight into the phenomena of 'flaming' (acrimonious communiqués)

The view of writing not as a neat sequence of planning, organising, writing and then revising (Raimes, 1985) but as an unfolding process wherein invention takes place during the act of writing (Spack, 1984) makes it possible to hypothesise that the BBS community is a dynamic community that creates itself in the process of interchange between the participants. Hellerstein (1989) in a study of another BBS system has made a similar observation about the construction of social realities in CMC and proposes that they are constructed in a manner similar to face-to-face situations:

> Evidence from the focus groups and survey indicated that there are many differing social realities[9] created on-line just as there are differing realities in face-to-face and other forms of mediated communication. It was concluded that social reality on computer-mediated communication is constructed in the same manner as in other communication situations (1989, p. 1).

One study that indicates that the normal process of creating and maintaining relationships may be altered by the CMC medium concerns a CMC experiment at Northwest Missouri State University (NWMSU) where an instructor opened a bulletin board using the on-campus network. The BBS was initially designed to encourage a participatory style of composition but eventually became the scene of "heightened rhetoric and argument" scaring some of the students off the network and nearly destroying it (Allen, 1993). The NWMSU study was primarily designed to determine if a BBS could be used in an academic setting without supervision. Allen concluded that the medium was far more complicated and contextual than some of the students had anticipated with the result that language used on the BBS was inadequate for the relationships developed in the medium.

The members of the *Censorship* BBS in the present study found the CMC medium context had the ability to wield a strong influence on their perceptions of their relationships and how they are conducted within cyberspace. Over a period of time they made

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[8] This is a fourth generation reference. The author was not able to get a primary reference. There are a number of tertiary and secondary references in the paper which arguably mar its scholarship.

[9] 'Realities' may be something of an overstatement here. 'Contexts' or 'environments' are perhaps preferable until there is a working definition of reality offered--which is certainly beyond the scope of this paper.

observations that the original purpose of an informal forum for sharing ideas and experiences was too simplistic and limited a schema. Additionally, their normal behaviour was inadequate in a purely linguistic setting; they encountered aggression with which they were ill prepared to deal and had to go through a long period of adjustment to find the style of interaction appropriate to convey their intentions without apparent aggression.

Chesebro and Bonsall note that some studies have shown that computer mediated conferences are less effective than traditional conferences as a means to resolving conflict or problematic issues. There seems to be a retarding effect caused by the greater amount of time required to actually communicate; the absence of non-verbal and vocal cues do not allow the participants the chance to survey and react in the process of reaching resolutions more quickly (1989, p. 122-23). They also note research that shows that with long-term use computer conferencing tends to evolve into task oriented communication as fewer and shorter sentences are used and interpersonal issues are eschewed (Kohl, Newman & Tomey, 1975, cited in Chesebro and Bonsall, 1989, p. 123). This adds to the view that CMC is not to be regarded as a wholly different kind of medium but a hybrid with characteristics of other types of communication present with a different rate of development in the discourse.

Sussman, Golden and Beauclair (1991) have addressed the nature of Email communication from the perspective of those interchanges that are perceived as negative in an academic institution. Sussman, Golden and Beauclair are of the opinion that these negative interchanges are 'critical incidents' that violate the norms, assumptions and expectations of the communication process; these critical incidents serve to highlight the changes generated by a new communication technology (1991, p. 70)

Comparing Sekuler's comments of word processing as an enhancing influence in writing (1985, p. 42, cited in Chesebro & Bonsall, 1989, p. 146), it would seem that there is disagreement between the views of Sussman et al. and Sekuler. However, this may be due to the difference in the two ways of writing: on-line and off-line. When the writer (speaker) writes off-line, there is time to revise, consider and then send the message. Writing on-line does not by comparison give the writer much time to revise, consider and then the message. Writing on-line does not by comparison give the writer much time for reflection. Sussman, Golden and Beauclair have elucidated this distinction in their inquiries

Sussman, Golden and Beauclair (1991) interviewed full-time faculty and administrators at a southeastern university in the U. S. A. where the IBM Professional Office System® (PROFS) had just been installed and the participants were using the system for the first time (levels of computer literacy were not defined). The analysis of the 'critical incidents' was done through the participants' description of their negative experiences. Three effects of the electronic communication were revealed through the analysis of the critical incidents:

1. The medium is the message: Users tend to lose sight of the communication act and become engrossed in manipulating the hardware and the software involved--the

electronic functions--rather than considering the reaction of the receiver.

2. The hierarchy is abolished: the Email systems can be programmed to send a message to one or many people without regard for their relative status in the group.

3. Richness disappears: all nonverbal cues are eradicated, nuances provided by tone of voice, posture, gestures, eye contact, and facial expression are missing; people can not read each other as well.

Flaming

When, as Sussman et al. put it, the medium is the message, the sender oriented attribute apparently lessens sensitivity to the human dimension of communication and the phenomenon of 'flaming' results from the instantaneous nature of transmission without the inhibitions cued from kinesic and prosodic influences. 'Flaming' is computer users' jargon for hasty notes sent without any cooling off between the composition of the message and the act of sending it; once you hit the button it's on its way and can't be recalled or mitigated as easily as voice or face-to-face discourse. When people flame, they get carried away to the point of profanity.

Aggression

Flaming is also considered to be a manifestation of the 'uninhibited behaviour' associated with communicating via computer. Lea, et al. (1992) explore in some depth the phenomenon of flaming and challenge what they say is a widely accepted claim that CMC somehow promotes such behaviour. They argue that flaming is in fact both radically context-dependent and relatively uncommon in CMC. They contend, with supporting data, that research has tended to decontextualise flaming with the consequence that flaming has come to be regarded as a characteristic of the medium. The flaming phenomenon is in part due to reduced social cues, and the characteristics of some computing subcultures.

Comments from participants on the BBS in this study may support this to some degree. There were people in the community who spent a great deal of time in adversarial political discussions[10]. The CMC medium actually seems to facilitate extended 'flame topics'[11] for two reasons stated above (1) the participants are able to engage in the discussion when it is convenient and (2) the written text can be easily retrieved, quoted and refuted at the participants' leisure regardless of the point to which the debate has gone. On the *Censorship* BBS forum, rebuttals and retorts were often made within hours of some of the more heated exchanges but typically rebuttals can be made days or even weeks after the initial assertions

[10] One person known as DC ROSE moderated a separate 'topic' in which he used a style of rhetoric very similar to that of Rush Limbaugh, a popular political pundit in the U. S. (or notorious depending on one's personal view). DC ROSE, in the words of another participant, STRIDER, "came out shooting and did very well".

[11] Forums specifically for controversial subjects where FTAs are abundant and harsh language is the norm.

are made. This, in a very real sense, would support the view that flaming is a characteristic of computing subcultures.

COMLINK[12], one of the more experienced participants in the BBS, offered the opinion that people who get carried away bring a certain perspective to the CMC environment--they have strong beliefs and see things as all or nothing--truth is objective in nature From this it seems that these interactants believe contrary opinions are ill-conceived and attributed to stupidity or lying (personal correspondence 7/1/94). Some people, in other words, are persistently adversarial in CMC [13]. One of the most adversarial was DC ROSE, a participant who initiated and maintained numerous arguments and engaged in lengthy diatribes in the *Censorship* forum. On the other hand, there were other contexts in the BBS wherein DC ROSE was very helpful to those who posed questions of a technical nature. This may indicate that some BBS may have 'micro-environments' that are distinct in some ways that are not altogether clear.

So, investigations that do not take into account the social factors brought into the CMC could be accused of decontextualising as Lea, O'Shea, Fung, and Spears (1992) claim. On the other hand, it does not seem decontextualising to say that flaming is a result of reduced social clues--in fact it would seem to be contextualising to establish reduced social clues as a factor in CMC.

The public nature of the CMC communiqués that are read by a large number of people on BBS forums also seems to effect the style interaction. Several of the participants in the BBS in this study believed that when faced with public ridicule (real or imagined) the responses tend to be more passionate than those they observed made in private through Email.

These aspects of the behaviour observed in CMC bring us to Lyons' knowledge of the code or style appropriate to a given channel (e. g. written or spoken varieties) and knowledge of the appropriate register (1977). Again it seems reasonable to say that adjusting to the lack of familiar contextual clues (which are a normal part of discourse outside of cyberspace) takes more time and the process of establishing and maintaining relationships is slower. More commonly now, after the beginning of this study, I have noticed people taking their discussions to private email with increasing frequency. The public nature of the CMC communication is beginning to make an impact as the novelty of the medium wears off and the participants begin to reassert their normal social parameters that would be observed in face-to-face and other off-line.

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[12] Many of the quotes are from COMLINK since he, more than the others committed most of his thoughts to written text. COMLINK is also living in another country and was not available for face-to-face interviews.

[13] DC ROSE, a very outspoken and often abusive member of the *Censorship* forum was not adversarial in face-to-face encounters while he was associated with the BBS in this paper. Another participant. TWADDLE encountered DC ROSE nearly a year later in June of 1994 on another BBS. DC ROSE's style of adversarial discourse was still intact and TWADDLE got a screen full when he asked a simple question about the source of a news article.

Sussman, Golden & Beauclair are of the opinion that electronic functions are evidently an artificial barrier which distorts normal communication and people are more aggressive than normal. Todman, Alm and Elder (1994, p. 50) state that computer aided conversations present a greater scope than usual for misunderstanding and fewer mechanisms for dealing with these problems. This increased potential for misunderstanding was apparent to the participants in this BBS who noted that normally polite and considerate people become very aggressive and hostile. Participants in this study offered several explanations including the observation that the social parameters were not deliberately violated but misapplied--people who were normally very friendly in person have a kind of Jekyl and Hyde complex. Discourse strategies to seek clarification or the simple act of giving someone the benefit of the doubt in a disagreement were neglected and flaming resulted with the receiver responding in kind, establishing a recurrent pattern of aggression, a sort of feedback loop.

It is evident that this altered perception of discourse clues, also noted by other members of this BBS community, is not readily apparent to many new participants because some people who often become engaged in 'flame wars' [14] do not as a matter of course seek conflict for the sake of conflict; any given exchange may not represent the normal extra-CMC behaviour of the individuals involved while for others it may be typical behaviour. In other words relationships in the community outside of cyberspace may not contain the conditions for aggression. People who are normally more poised outside of the CMC environment evince a heightened proclivity for FTAs because they fail to adjust to the lack of non-linguistic clues and flame[15]. So it makes sense to say the FTAs themselves can be viewed as a distinctive aspect of the environment. It is my opinion then that there is the need to investigate aggression in the context of individual as well as community relationships; to consider the moment of the interaction as well as the entire environment because some people who often become engaged in 'flame wars are rather more circumspect outside of the cyberspace.

The reduced amount of flaming evident in the entire BBS at the time of writing seems to support some of the participants' view that most people did not deliberately seek acrimonious conflict, they misinterpreted the linguistic cues in the absence of non-linguistic cues and have since learned to deal with this medium of communication in less aggressive ways by avoiding the confrontations or mitigating their discourse. This may represent a sort of leveling off in aggression that would be evident in face-to-face relationships except that intuitively it seemed to take rather more time than would be evident in face-to-face communication.

The marriage of normal assumptions made in typical communication and the

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[14] 'Flame wars' is the Internet jargon for extended acrimonious exchanges when people flame frequently.
[15] As an example of this, two very vociferous adversaries, BART and STRIDER, were able to converse amicably on numerous occasions face-to-face and with others in and out of cyberspace (STRIDER, personal communication, 7/19/94).

technological medium brings into play variables that have a dynamic influence on the manner in which the people involved communicate with each other, something that may lend additional credence to Chesebro and Bonsall's position that interactants may be profoundly effected by the medium (Chesebro and Bonsall, 1989, pp. pp. 137-149).

These investigations seem to echo the parameters of context proposed by Lyons and Ochs. Ignorance of the parameters of knowledge of the larger societal circumstances, the medium, appropriate subject matter and province (Lyons, 1977, p. 574), apparently are the initial pitfalls for the inexperienced in CMC. Ochs' observation concerning the language users' perceptions and beliefs of related verbal and non-verbal actions and social interaction (1979, pp. 1 & 5) seems to describe the initial problems encountered in CMC as well. The different timing and clues to the pragmatic dimension of discourse take longer to adjust to in cyberspace; in an evolving paradigm, what is a face threatening act in July, may not be a face threatening act in August.

Social Hierarchy: Relational Variables

Hierarchy, Sussman et al.'s second point, presents another area of vulnerability. Institutional hierarchies impose potential threats to negative face--the freedom of self-determination--by virtue of the unevenly distribute authority to control the actions of others. While abolishment of the institutional hierarchy may be considered socially egalitarian and technologically flexible, it can cause friction among those who place a higher priority on order and chain-of-command. In other words, some people who prefer existing formalised roles are predisposed to oppose certain types of communication inherent in the system and will infer a breach of etiquette where none was intended.

The altered perception of existing roles is also supported by a study by Smilowitz, Compton, and Flint (1988). They investigated how the absence of the contextual cues (normal in face-to-face interaction) influences individual judgments in computer-mediated contexts. Forty-five undergraduates participated in a computerized revision of the classic procedures of S. E. Asch's[16] "majority against a minority of one" investigation (1956, cited in Smilowitz et al., 1988). Results indicate that computer-mediated communication is likely to diminish the effects of social pressures to conform to majority judgments. This particular study supports the hypothesis that the influence of face-to-face interaction carries an inhibiting effect that is altered in the BBS communities' social structure.

The discussion this far has supported the view that it is possible, even necessary to look at FTAs in CMC as events distinct from the larger social setting which includes the world outside of cyberspace. This is particularly true for Sussman et al.'s data which concerns the

[16] References to Solomon Asch were absent in Brown and Levinson (1987), nor were there any references in Fasold (1990), or Levinson (1983). In light of the underlying basis in sociolinguistics that Asch's work constitutes, this oversight is puzzling.

established parameters found in an institution.

But what of an environment that has no formally established hierarchy of social roles that imposes threats to negative face? The study by Smilowitz et al., a population of virtual equals, would seem to be just such an environment. But the lack of a formally established hierarchy of authority or procedure dictated by people in a policy making capacity must not be taken as the lack of social roles that have no order of authoritative precedence. Even in a non-institutional community such as the BBS in this study, there may be a hierarchy of sorts that underlies the community's relationships. The hierarchy need not be expressed or even known to exist but breaches in etiquette may be explained in part by the assumptions people have of what constitutes proper behaviour toward the relative positions of others.

Some hierarchical perspectives seem to be related to perceived levels of belonging, an attitude that is also apparent in the comments made by 'Bruce', a participant in the TEL BBS, to Ogan (1993, p. 187). Bruce classified the members as either outsiders or active participants who had a right to dictate the nature and the purpose of the discourse topic.

Ogan goes on to say that usual claims to status were not found in the communication; it did not matter what a person's social position was in the TEL (1993, pp. 186-187). However, there were still perceptions of proper behaviour such as Bruce's concern for the right to make decisions and there were also attempts at eliminating people from the TEL BBS who did not have the proper political perspective--a hierarchy of politically correct perspectives is evidence of social order; those who have position can dictate what is discussed and those that do not have position can not speak freely (Ogan, 1993, p. 186). A new social hierarchy was apparently constructed within the TEL BBS environment.

This perception of a hierarchy of politically correct perspectives was also a major concern of BART and DC ROSE, two of the interactants on the *Censorship* BBS. It formed a focal point in the 'debate' over censorship as they argued the position that political opinions were being used to measure standards of acceptance and degrees of freedom in the BBS. COMLINK also indicated that there was an unwritten but very strong concept of protocol within the BBS community that invoked strong reaction ("they get it back in their faces") when an individual's sense of etiquette was violated. Whether this constitutes the inter-relational manifestations of a social hierarchy is at least a possibility.

It might be helpful to offer a hypothesis in support of this point. Participants do seem to establish a sense of territory in some of the longer standing BBS communities[17]. Newcomers may actually be prone to a great deal of circumspection and may draw more 'fire' from the 'veterans'. For this reason, some breaches of etiquette by older established members may go un-remarked whereas newer members will not be allowed as much leeway in their style of interaction. In this way, the perception of 'flaming' will evince more

[17] This may be mitigated by the community size: The larger it is the less important membership is.

restricted parameters in those interchanges involving newer members than the interchanges between veteran members. This may possibly constitute evidence of a social hierarchy[18].

These two situations, differentiating established and new members, may show differences in the risks in FTAs that influence their type and frequency. In an institution, the established hierarchy may reduce the number of FTAs by virtue of restricting them to the direction they are given. In an authoritarian community, the FTAs would be very stratified, from the top down and especially in punitive environments. The lack of a well defined hierarchy may evince a greater number of FTAs since arguably more people would be free of intimidation to say what they think at the spur of the moment. Unfortunately, to establish this beyond conjecture requires more than this paper can offer but the hypothesis does provide some direction for further inquiry.

From Anathasiadou it is possible to also developed the hypothesis that questions indicate social hierarchies by establishing the types of questions that can be asked by people at different levels in a social hierarchy. Formality is apparently a characteristic of the use of questions of indirect requests and social relationships determine who can ask various types of rhetorical questions (1991, p. 119). Rhetorical questions were a common feature on the *Censorship* BBS. The frequency with which they were used would indicate that perceptions of a sort of hierarchy were expressed through the types of questions asked. They may also indicate varied perceptions of hierarchy since the frequent use of sarcastic rhetorical questions and the resultant acrimonious exchanges are arguably a result of opposing perceptions of their appropriateness.

Another aspect of hierarchy is language style. The skill or lack of skill in using language is a possible influence that would be context specific and arguably evolve inside the BBS. S. Gilfert[19] (personal communication) has suggested that a particularly skillful person could develop dominance through style or register. This may be "a way of one-upmanshipping". The author tends to agree. The statements by participants that do address this aspect of hierarchy are few but there were members who were very successful in debate and their skills won them respect within the community[20]

Although Sussman et al. have stated that CMC obliterates hierarchy, it would seem that this observation needs careful qualification. It may be that the hierarchy remains but that it becomes distorted. Individuals may retain their perspective of the pre-existing hierarchy but the absence of normal inhibitions for example lead to a mismatch in the perceptions in the

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[18] The means of supporting this hypothesis would come from a comparative study of BBS/listserver discussion groups that form and change participants quickly. This would negate the possibility for the establishment of long term members who would establish a kind of territorial claim.

[19] Professor in Applied Linguistics at Nagoya College of Foreign Studies and a reviewer for this paper.

[20] There was certainly a healthy respect for DC ROSE's ability to engage others in debate. DC ROSE played, during the conflict recorded here, a dominant role and most of the participants had to deal with him from time to time -- usually with very little success in a confrontation.

community. Those who believe themselves to be in a dominant position may not have the normal mechanisms that allows them to assert their position. FTAs expressed toward positive face may not be as strong or as noticeable in the CMC as they are, say, in voice only discourse. It is also possible that new hierarchies are constructed in those situations where none were established *a priori* . This would support the view that interactants will bring their perceptions of social relationships into a new type of environment and transplant their social framework and its mechanisms.

To continue with Sussman, Golden & Beauclair's third criteria, the lack of richness; as the richness of kinesic and prosodic cues are obliterated, normal inter-relational signals are distorted and the linguistic element of communication must carry the entire burden of responsibility. Emotional overtones are misinterpreted and the participants are left without the cues and signals that have guided them through discourse all of their lives. This can reasonably be considered a part of the problem noted by Chesebro and Bonsall that teleconferencing is a slower process. Arguably, comments by participants in the *Censorship* BBS on inappropriate responses (flaming) can be partially accommodated in this view.

Ball-Rokeach and Reardon (1989, cited in Ogan, 1993) also include reduced sensory input in their classification of media according to function and form. Ogan addresses their category of 'sensory authenticity' in CMC in this way:

> -- lower than either interpersonal or mass communication because of the lack of appeal to sound, sight, touch, smell, etc.. It's just words on the screen. Telelogic communication [communication at a distance] has not developed the ability to appeal to more senses except in its limited video conference use, but users have learned to express emotions through the use of graphics created from keyboard symbols. (1993, p. 189)

Kim and Raja (1991) refer to this condition as "meager nonverbal clues":

> Computer-mediated communication lacks the aural and visual social information which is provided in face-to-face communication, and which is partly provided in telephone and video conference communication (Kiesler, Zubrow, Moses, & Geller, 1984, p. 80). A person using computer-mediated communication is focusing his or her attention simply on a written message. (Kim & Raja, 1991, p. 6)

Comments from several participants indicated that the non-verbal clues absent in the BBS made a significant difference in BBS interaction when introduced into the participants' relationship. When the CMC relationship began without any face-to-face contact or voice communication there was a marked tendency toward misunderstanding and flaming. This aggressive nature was noticeably alleviated when the adversaries meet face-to-face and interacted socially. Disembodied texts assumed human faces as it were.

We can hypothesise that the reduced non-linguistic input in this BBS could be augmented by personal contact outside of cyberspace and the normal parameters of social politeness

reestablished to a noticeable degree. This has a bearing on the hypothesis that the influence of these non-linguistic aspects of communication are all the more evident for their absence in CMC.

The literature supports this observation. People do, in fact, attempt to partially define these social parameters with substitutes for non-verbal clues. As Ball-Rokeach and Reardon pointed out, emotions are expressed through the symbols on the keyboards. The normal clues are still important enough for the interactants to seek them out or find substitutes. In fact, this BBS community actively furthers this goal of social community by scheduling parties from time to time.

The number of participants in a community may also effect the level of aggression and the perception of FTAs. One of the more experienced members in the CMC community made an observation that the size of the of the community effects the amount of flaming Larger communities seem to treat flaming with indifference whereas smaller communities are ore profoundly effected by aggressive interaction, "the culture becomes attenuated ... reactionism is more tolerated" (COMLINK, personal correspondence, 7/1/94

Then there is the situation where the 'lack of richness' or 'meager verbal clues' begins diminish in importance; the sheer size of the BBS community alters perceptions--a further indication of the factors that alter perceptions of etiquette and hierarchy. This may directly effect the evaluation of FTA risk on the basis of community size since a FTA must be perceived as such by the receiver before there is any threat. In other words, no matter how BOR a statement may be, it is may simply not be a FTA in a larger community.

METHODOLOGY

The Source of the Data in This Study

BBSs[21] offer the means to study the ways individuals from varied social contexts interact in a predominantly linguistic medium. The primary data for this paper is taken directly from a BBS text after it became inactive, i. e., no one was posting any more communiqués. During the process of constructing the entire text there were no evidence of outside observers taking notes and the current study was not in progress or known to be under consideration--all situations that could have conceivably changed the outcome; the primary data is wholly

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[21] A 'BBS' is essentially a 'place' in cyberspace wherein people talk to each other via computer. The computers may be linked by telephone or by cable. BBSs are a place to exchange information interactively as opposed to teletext wherein the person simply receives a copy of information stored in another computer (downloading). BBSs are distinctive in cyberspace for their interactive discourse. Email is interactive, but is not posted for groups of people to see; Email is basically terminal to terminal whereas BBS texts can be accessed from multiple terminals and usually added to by those who read (Writing on a BBS may be limited to a few rather than all those who can read the text.).

natural (Tannen, 1984, cited in Harris, 1990, p. C3.4). This style of study is suited to comparison to Brown and Levinson's work which also used source data from the actual situations. From this they then proceeded to make generalisations in regard to the principles they were proposing (Gumperz, in Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. xiii).

The text analysed in this study is augmented by the information gleaned from correspondence with the participants. An important aspect of investigating this BBS this way is that there is arguably a greater opportunity: (a) to establish what were perceived as the parameters of face and (b) gain insight into the 'rational' processes that participants engaged in and how these may have effected the way they developed their perceptions of the BBS context. From this, I attempted to extrapolate the rationale for their chosen style of communication. I also had the opportunity to interact with some of the participants on the BBS in this study outside the context of the BBS itself providing the opportunity to gain insight into the discourse styles of the participants outside of cyberspace and compare these with the style of communication they evinced in CMC.

This type of small case study research, as Robinson points out, is not to be used for generalisation because (a) there are few if any similar studies with which to compare and (b) the population sample is very small. The purpose of this study is to allow the reader to view the environment in a specific context and the way the participants deal with their situation. It is, by its very nature, highly personal and contextual (Robinson, 1993, p. 19)

Acts and Intentions and Environment

Brown and Levinson's analysis is predominantly involved with interaction as if it were built out of individual acts (1987, p. 232). But since there was some freedom of inquiry into the actual circumstances of the BBS in this study, we are afforded some contextualising insights into the participants' concerns that were brought to the BBS from their personal lives.

The primary issues in the *Censorship* topic (the name of the discussion 'topic' in this study) concerned the control of the BBS which became part of a commercial *Internet* listserver[22] during the life of this topic. This concern for control gave the conflict an overall threat to negative face which could curtail freedom of choice. There were also peripheral issues involving an outside organisation that used the BBS's technology and the private lives

[22] "Listserver" implies all the functions of computerised communications including the interactive local BBS itself and the ability to interact with computers all over the world via international telephone lines, e. g. USENET. Sending or receiving a communication to another listserver is not a function of the BBS although members of other listservers can often join a BBS topic from outside the immediate computer network. 'listservers' are referred to as listservers because they receive 'lists' (computer users' inputted data) from other computer networks and 'serve' the lists to the members/subscribers.

of some of the members that provide clues to the participants' behaviour.

This background information provides the means of pursuing Brown and Levinson's observation that FTAs do not necessarily exist in single acts and hence the concept might be better labeled 'face-threatening-intention' :

> A higher level intention to issue a criticism [e. g. ulterior motives] may be conveyed by a series of acts (and responses) that are not themselves FTAs, or are not the particular FTA in question ... plans,--including conversational plans--are hierarchical, and conversational understanding is achieved by reconstruction of levels of intent beyond and above the integrative of those that lie behind particular utterances or sentences. (1987, pp. 232-33)

Brown and Levinson's idea of a face threatening intention seems somewhat more restrictive in the overall context in which it is applied here. For this reason, there may need to be some qualification to designate this a face threatening environment in which intentions and acts are played out.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data was written between July 1993 and August 1994. The members quoted in the data were all members of the BBS at the time of the flame wars and many were involved in the *Censorship* forum. The *nom de plume* of the members have been changed. All quoted members' names are in capital letters. The members quoted are DC ROSE and BART who represented the viewpoint that secret topics and selective membership were violations of their rights and STRIDER, COMWEST, TWADDLE, ANZAC, MCAREN and the others who were primarily proponents of the opposing viewpoints.

All quoted data from the BBS forums are in italics and quotes within quoted data (the quote and comment format) are set off further from the left margin and marked by >> at the beginning and << at the end.

In this example,

> 31 (of 290) ANZAC June 20, 1993 at 12:13 NST (822 characters)

31 is the number of the note in the order that it was input, *(of 290)* indicates the total number of notes at the time I downloaded it to store for reference, *ANZAC* is the author of the posting, *June 20, 1993 at 12:13 NST* is the date and time of the entry, and the last entry indicates the number of characters in the entry. The number of characters is used by some BBS to determine the cost of the entry. This BBS charges a flat rate for the first 20 hours and additional for any time over that.

Some entries are numbered, e. g. [#1], and my comments are then keyed to that number and placed at the end of the posting or the entire exchange. This is done so to maintain the flow of the data and the coherence of my remarks.

Characteristics of this BBS Discourse

1. The Quote and Comment Format of Manipulated 'Turn-taking'

As mentioned earlier, the extensive quoting and reconstruction of another person's text seems to be a form of turn-taking that is entirely controlled by the speaker/writer. This concern will not be a part of this paper however features presented by the quote and comment format make the topic an intrigulng possibility for future study. For the purposes of this paper it is enough to note that turn-taking violations (interrupting, ignoring, selection of other speakers, not responding to prior turns) are apparently different or inapplicable. Even if someone is ignored by the intended hearer, the speakers always have the option of addressing their opinions to the audience in a BBS (though this may not be an option for private Email). In the BART-STRIDER exchange below, this format is demonstrably a means of controlling the exchange as well as endowing coherency into a response to an earlier post.

2. Deletions and Modifications

Deletions of entire posts or modifications were not uncommon--in the *Censorship* forum about 5% of the posts were deleted and about 3% modified. Deletions can be construed as a type of repair. Rather like correcting oneself when something inappropriate is said in haste or when a mistake in one's statement becomes clear during a conversation. There were some apparent differences between spoken discourse and this CMC BBS. The deletions done by the writers were typically for inappropriate or irrelevant posts and the modifications were rewrites and corrections to clear up any incoherent or inappropriate entries. Deletions by anyone other than the original writer usually resulted in acrimony and suspicion. If the person administrating the BBS forum decided something was not appropriate for that particular forum then it was sometimes deleted by the administrator. These types of deletions usually sparked accusations and jibes about censorship indicating a general perception of a negative FTA. When done by the moderator, the stated reasons were for inappropriate or irrelevant posts. In either case, the party responsible learned to redress what became known to be serious negative face FTAs. Eventually the practice of explaining deletions and modifications became fairly standard practice on this BBS. The explanation would appear in a later posting[23].

3. Implicature in this BBS

The heavy use of irony and rhetorical questions made implicature[24] a readily apparent

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[23] The posts were numbered as they were written and placed in the BBS files. In the event of a deletion the post and its number were omitted and the remaining posts were not renumbered, hence there was a missing number for all to see.

feature of the flame wars on this BBS. Some people used them so extensively they were not ambiguous but BOR FTAs that were readily deducible within the BBS community.

4. The basic issues underlying threats to negative face

The following discussion highlights the two biggest underlying threats to negative face evident in this BBS community. The first and weakest threat was the use of closed topics (partitioning) and the copied notes exposing the existence of the closed topics. Partitioning meant that some topics would be accessible to everyone (open or public) and others would be exclusive to only those who were invited (closed or private). For DC ROSE and others like him they did not feel that they were given freedom to interact with others as they wished. Those who supported closed topics, on the other hand, felt that the right to privacy was a natural condition and DC ROSE's actions were a threat to the negative face of those who insisted on the closed topics. These closed topics were not openly announced at the beginning when the BBS formed but were revealed in the 'notes'[25] also referred to as a 'chain letter'. The notes were copied onto floppy discs and sent to people outside of the closed topic. The existence of the topics and the distribution of the notes were perceived as a betrayal of trust of the relative groups that led to nearly three years of acrimonious exchanges.

In the second and stronger threat to negative face, DC ROSE is saying that the notes contained evidence that the idea of expelling DC ROSE and BART among a few others were discussed. They would have been (as DC ROSE and BART eventually were) completely stripped of their freedom of self determination within the context of this BBS.

Being stripped of their freedom to access of this BBS was important for three reasons. The first reason was that they used this for their business communications and for technical advice in their business operations. Overlapping this first reason is the moral and technical support they received by virtue of interacting with fellow professionals. Most of these participants were expatriates living in a country wherein they had very small social circles if any and this social community may have formed a significant part of their lives.

The third reason, which was anticipated by all during this conflict, was developed about the time BART and DC ROSE were expelled. When the BBS became a listserver with access to the international computer network of more than 2 million computers via Internet[26],

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[24] Deducible propositions together with some item(s) shared by speaker and hearer, and a set of shared inference rules. (Smith and Wilson, 1979: 173-74)

[25] The "notes" were communications posted on certain topics (forums within the BBS for specific topics) that were limited to certain people and were evidently passed around to people outside the specified group. This is the focus of most of the acrimony. The notes 'reveal' that some members were trying to get other members expelled because they were disruptive and were polarising this particular BBS community.

the degree and type of freedom changed dramatically. Access to the international social and technical world was to increase immensely and it has done so. Some of the world's leading experts in most fields take part in discussions on listservers all over the world and any one with access to a listserver can communicate as an equal in these social and technological discussion groups. The technical information alone is worth the price of admission.

The range of freedom is also immense. It is possible, for very little money, to visit friends and acquaintances daily on the other side of the globe. This imbues the participants of this system with a great deal of freedom.

Control of this freedom, a topic far larger than this paper, is an issue being contested in the media and court rooms all over the globe. Participants in BBSs have fought and beaten the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States and major multinational corporations in national courts in several countries. The issue of control and the right to self-determination in CMC is a major sociological and legal issue that can not overstressed. Needless to say, the potential for threats to negative face form a major underlying 'face threatening intention' that must be taken into account in this BBS community and similar communities.

Two of the most articulate debaters of this issue were ANZAC and DC ROSE. They were also on opposite sides of the issue. ANZAC is, in face-to-face conversations, very soft spoken and speaks with erudition. He is a journalist with an alternative magazine in the country of his residence that was originally started to voice opposition to the government's political agreements with one of the Superpowers. He habitually speaks with discourse markers that indicate his position rather than his opposition relative to others. When he does disagree, he usually chooses to state his opinion and pose questions about the positions that he disagrees with rather than saying they are wrong. His style on the BBS is very similar. He is often self-effacing, has a dry sense of humour and offers his opinions as his understanding without there necessarily being a right way and a wrong way. He usually defends his positions with articulate arguments and will state his feelings as such when that is the underlying reason for his beliefs and actions. He does not state his feelings as the inescapable truth--he offers his point of view.

DC ROSE, who was not available for personal face-to-face interviews, was by all accounts a very reasonable and easy-to-talk-to person--off the BBS. He would readily argue his position on the BBS and in fact gained respect from people like STRIDER as an articulate

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[26] Internet was constructed by the Defense Department of the United States in the 1970's to link computers in the U. S. in the hopes of circumventing partial destruction (i. e. nuclear war) to permit continued function (Krol , 1993). Currently the Internet, supported by the National Science Foundation, has been enlarged and is being used by schools, private agencies, libraries etc. to exchange information and interact. It reaches 134 countries and is hooked up to more than 15 million computer stations (Pawloski, 1994).

debater prior to the flame wars. When the notes surfaced and the flame wars began, however, he frequently engaged in *ad hominem* and spoke assertively about topics with little or no flexibility in his opinion. He generalised to a great extent and viewed the world (or at least the topics on this 'topic') in a very polarised manner--everything was 'left-wing' or 'liberal' and 'nazi' or it was not left-wing and therefore correct and just. He usually addressed his opponent as one speaking to an audience; which of course he was addressing in the open topics. His point of view was often the 'inescapable truth'[27]. He arguably rationalised his change in discourse style from an articulate debater to an abusive one by placing himself in the role of victim in a 'political struggle'. Much of his discourse was not openly FTAs but an extended series of rhetorical questions or suppositions that set up the FTAs

> 31 (of 290) ANZAC June 20, 1993 at 12:13 NST (822 characters)
> *By the way, since this topic is about censorship, I suppose I'm guilty of having supported "partition,"* [#1] in *the sense that this means having some places where anyone can be, and other places where only a limited group can meet. So what?* [#2]
> [sic text deleted here for brevity]
> *I can't for the life of me understand why I should be guilty of censorship just for wanting to have a place to talk privately with people.* [#3]
>
> 34 (of 290) DC ROSE June 22, 1993 at 16:28 NST (2948 characters)
> *ANZAC 31*
>
> > *<<By the way, since this topic is about censorship, I suppose I'm guilty of having supported "partition," in the sense that this means having some places where anyone can be, and other places where only a limited group can meet. So what?>>*
>
> *So you're a nazi.* [#4] *Where do you get the arrogance to set yourself up to partition a commercial system on the basis of political correctness?* [#2] *Having private topics wasn't enough for you, eh? You wanted to be able to say, "Well, we have to let everyone into this tacky 'public' area, but the most 'constructive and lively' discussions take place behind the tripe curtain, over here in this much larger area where we only invite 'nice people.' Politics? Oh, no, politics has nothing to do with it. It's just that some of these 'jerks' are so rude and vicious, you see."* [#5]
>
> *Still, judging from your performance in the private topics*[28]*, you're not a Supernazi.*

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[27] He still carries this adversarial attitude as is evident from a communiqué he wrote on another listserver after he was expelled from this one (c. f. reference to earlier communiqué from TWADDLE)

Not a Joseph Mengele. Just a rank-and-file brownshirt.

*<<If people were thrown off *listserver* for what they said>>*

You mean like some of the other nazis in your secret topics were trying to persuade SYSOP to do? And you, of course, having a finely honed sense of ethics, held up your hand and said, "Stop. This is wrong." Didn't you?[29] [#5]

[text deleted here for brevity]

35 (of 290) ANZAC June 22, 1993 at 19:12 NST (1861 characters)

DC ROSE [34]:

I don't mind discussing this, really. But I don't understand why every sentence has to contain a word that's meant to be insulting or to make me angry. ... I don't know what everything has to be "Nazis this," "You nazis that." I've made it clear before that I didn't like that term, and the your counterargument, though correct, doesn't stop the fact that a lot of people link nazi with the OTHER definition which you didn't mention.

As far as what you're saying goes, I guess you're not so angry about private topics, but don't like ones that are, for example, read-only, or those that are private but seem to be public? I

happen to work mostly in journalism, and it's always seemed to me that any newspaper or magazine or book, for that matter, could be considered in a sense a form of censorship. I don't know of any newspaper or magazine around that just prints everything it receives.

[section deleted for brevity]

36 (of 290) DC ROSE June 22, 1993 at 22:51 NST (5819 characters)

ANZAC 35

<<I don't mind discussing this, really. But I don't understand why every sentence has to contain a word that's meant to be insulting or to make me

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[28] DC ROSE is referring to notes that he was given by an unnamed source. The notes contained the conversations in which ANZAC was a participant.

[29] During these discussions in the private topics, there is no evidence as far as DC ROSE claims, that ANZAC ever spoke out against expelling people. DC ROSE is thus saying that ANZAC is being hypocritical. Several of the participants expressed the opinion that this position evidently established, in DC ROSE's mind, a moral or intellectual superiority that gave him freedom to upbraid the others (including ANZAC) for the part they had to play in these expulsion discussions.

angry.>>

You still don't get it, do you?

I saw what you did.

This, "Who, me?" innocence doesn't cut it with me.

After what you've countenanced, you have no "moral authority" to become angry when called a nazi. [#6]

Besides, this is almost certainly just another of your routines. AwKKK did the same thing, and Woodenhead, and Roger, and Commie Weasel, and Waggle [#7]

[text deleted here for brevity]

<<I happen to work mostly in journalism>>

No you don't. You work in loony-left propaganda. [#8] *No more relation to journalism than one of Hitler's speeches.*

[text deleted here for brevity]

Oh, these disputes have certainly become personal. But they started with politics, and they wouldn't have occurred but for your bunch's political bigotry. So there's really no validity whatsoever to your imputation that at least part of the problem is--rather than political--that I'm such an asshole. Because if I were a left-wing asshole, you'd never have had a bad word to say. [#9]

5. Analysis of the ANZAC-DC ROSE exchange

Reference #1 is an FTA toward the speaker that serves as a positive politeness strategy. By accepting some blame, ANZAC is attempting to defuse the situation or make allowances for his behaviour that could mitigate DC ROSE's potential FTA against him. DC ROSE rarely let others mitigate his FTAs.

The references marked #2 are invitations to conversational implicature, rhetorical questions that serve as a politeness strategies. They are intended to avoid actually saying what would be a Bald On Record FTA. On the other hand, these kinds of rhetorical questions often serve to be impolite in that they are actually saying that the listener is wrong and not cognisant of what is obvious.

Reference #3 is a typical of ANZAC's style in that he does not tell people what to think but what he must logically or rationally believe. These kinds of statements avoid telling someone they are wrong and as such they are a politeness strategy.

The comment "so your a nazi" #4 is a BOR that has no real bearing on the argument except to impart insult and cause distress. The historical connotations are so odious that there can be no real comparison to the situation at hand even if ANZAC had been involved in an attempt at invidious discrimination. As such it is irrelevant and constitutes a step outside

the boundaries of appropriate language and province delineated by Lyons and Ochs. This is arguably part of DC ROSE's attempt to mount a face threatening environment against an existing face threatening environment that threatens DC ROSE.

DC ROSE (and BART) often told the others what they were to think and the real nature of their motivations. The two references #5 are attempts to impose control on the other's freedom of thought and speech. It does not work beyond creating more acrimony but it is certainly an attempt at censorship in that it aggressively asserts the other must agree with the speaker's position. This sort of imposition may be an attempt at a negative FTA which can not be derived from any social role that bestows authority of one person over another and as such carries little intimidating risk to the hearers' negative face.

In reference #6 DC ROSE continues to attack ANZAC without actually discussing what he "did". This is an FTA that is specifically aimed at ANZAC's values and thus constitutes a BOR FTA against ANZAC's positive face. DC ROSE is implying that ANZAC was a conspirator in the attempt to have DC ROSE kicked of the BBS. He is violating the Maxim of Manner by being vague (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 226) but it is not clear why. He had said in other exchanges that he was sworn to secrecy and could not reveal the exact contents of the notes or the person who revealed the notes.

ANZAC's part in all this was never proven although some other people who were writing in the closed topics were explicit in their desire to have certain members expelled (MCAREN, personal communication). So, while DC ROSE is referring to actual events he has failed to actually address the issue of ANZAC's role in these attempts. Rather than an argument to refute ANZAC's intentions toward DC ROSE, ANZAC himself is personally attacked in a manner that was typical of DC ROSE's discourse in this BBS.

In reference #7, AwKKK, Woodenhead etc., are other members whose *nom de plumes* DC ROSE has deliberately mangled for derisive effect in a overtly positive FTA. This is a common thread of attack for DC ROSE and was viewed as a puerile artifice that eventually turned some of his admirers against him. It is a method with which DC ROSE maintained a constant stream of positive FTAs and by accumulation made the environment very uncomfortable for the others.

6. Summary of the ANZAC-DC ROSE exchange

Within this particular conflict lays the underlying assumption of control that constitutes a threat to personal freedom; the possibility of imposed control of the freedom of self determination. DC ROSE's intentions are arguably to counter this perceived threat to negative face. He is, however, limited to linguistic mechanisms which seem to make him heavily dependent upon positive FTAs since he has no real power over ANZAC's freedom of self-determination. ANZAC's strategies and FTAs are also polite rather than negative. For both it seems apparent that they believe they have no real power over the other's self-

determination. DC ROSE and BART often posted lengthy notes that may have been a manifestation with their sense of powerlessness to actually effect the situation.

7. Linguistic devices for positive FTAs.

The following excerpt was posted by the participant BART (later expelled). All quotes from STRIDER are preceded with >>> and followed by <<<. All other comments are by BART. This is written in response to a message (number 9) posted by STRIDER, some days earlier.

This particular section features a lengthy assault on STRIDER's positive face with numerous BOR (Brown & Levinson 1978: 101-129). BART also uses a lot of metaphors (*cheap shot, trail of lies, crumble under scrutiny, puke, witch hunt, Nazis, lackey, Bozo, fluff,* etc.), irony and rhetorical questions to challenge or deride STRIDER. These are classified by Brown & Levinson as 'off-the-record' but metaphors and euphemisms can be polluted by extensive use until they are no longer 'off-record' (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 216). In fact, metaphors, which are categorically false, are often on-record when there is no mistake as to their meaning in which case they constitute a direct FTA--BOR.

Rhetorical questions are to ask without any intention of obtaining an answer--a violation of the Maxim of Quality (Sincerity) (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 223). But in the sense that BART uses these rhetorical questions they are to invite conversational implicature. In other words, the listener must infer what the speaker is saying. In this way BART implies that the answers are obvious and, since the rhetorical questions are challenges to STRIDER's earlier remarks, BART is saying that STRIDER missed the obvious. Such inferences are highly contextual and make the exchange a very closed one to those who do not share the necessary background information.

Ironical statements, stating the opposite of what is intended, are a violation of the Maxim of Quality. In this context, they arguably constitute on-record FTAs by virtue of the obvious and heavy irony they are given by BART's well known dislike for the 'misdeeds' of those who were involved in the closed topics. They are, in other words, very sarcastic.

Ironical statements are preceded and followed by #...#
Rhetorical questions are preceded and followed by %...%
Bald on Record statements are preceded and followed by @...@

25 (of 290) BART June 18, 1993 at 23:31 NST (7714 characters)

RE: STRIDER [note 9]

Have it your way. We will pursue the matter.

>>>Unlike some people, I don't even need to depend on anonymous chain

letters.<<<

#Cheap-shot STRIDER at his finest#. %What was I supposed to do? Ignore the transcripts? Burn every last page? % Someone went to a lot of trouble to make sure that I received transcripts of secret topics. Therefore, I verified that the secret topics existed, and I asked many of the parties concerned about secret topics in private notes. #Your wonderful "friends"# [10] *@consistently and continually lied about the very existence of secret topics for months (both publicly and privately)@. @Finally, their trail of lies and deceit began to crumble under scrutiny@. Then, their fall back, modified-limited-hangout position was that there were in fact secret topics, but this was ok because nothing untoward occurred. Then, there was the grudging admission that there might have been discussions about expulsions of members, but most people were against it. The very idea of secret discussions for the purpose of expelling members (a process which the sysop aided and abetted)* [#11] *should have been enough to make any decent person puke.* [#12] *But, not a single member of the secret topics tried to put a stop to the little witch-hunt.*

>>>It hasn't happened.<<<

%What hasn't happened? Total censorship of Parti?% This hasn't happened because @the intentions of the Nazis have been exposed%. #Your "friends"# are now too embarrassed to follow through, or even show their faces in public. But, why should they when have their little lackey to defend them? [#13]

[sic text deleted here for brevity]

>>>Hopefully he told you to quit acting like petulant twelve year old.<<<

@Wrong again, Bozo@. Actually, SYSOP LIKED (or said he did) the idea of "Everyone Except SYSOP." [#14]

[text deleted here for brevity]

>>>Let them laugh, though if they had any balls they wouldn't do it behind my back.<<< [#15]

I find it absolutely hilarious when sawed-off little runts try to act tough. [#16] *@I, for one, am laughing at you in public. @ But, I really shouldn't laugh. I should feel sorry for you#. You have that awful sensation one gets in the pit of the stomach when the evidence begins to mount that a "friend" has continually lied and used you.* [#17]

>>>I'm not defending anybody.<<<

[sic text deleted here for brevity]

>>>I'm attacking you.<<<

[text deleted here for brevity]

You are attacking me for stating the truth? Why? Because of @your blind loyalty to Dank?@ [#18]

[sic text deleted here for brevity]

As to your bedwetting about evidence...

Remember. At least I have transcripts. @You have nothing but #the assurances of "friends"# who have already been shown to be liars@. I would be a little uneasy if I were you. [#17

I have wondered what to do about the transcripts I received. That is why I asked SYSOP for a policy statement concerning the posting of private notes. And, I received a thinly veiled threat about the police in return. [#19] *I decided not to publish the notes. But, not because of any threats from SYSOP. A number of people had their names dragged through the mud privately in secret topics. I concluded that I didn't want to contribute to public humiliation of innocent parties by publishing the notes. Still, I am convinced that the entire sick story will eventually come out in the end. It generally does.*

[text deleted here for brevity]

8. Analysis of the BART-STRIDER exchange

So the issues here were the betrayal of trust through the disclosure (anonymously) of the notes (revealed in a 'chain letter') on one hand (which the person BART had possession of and would not disclose openly or reveal who gave them to him) and the rumours of expulsion of some of the BBS members who were disruptive (in the eyes of those who wanted them expelled) or because they did not hold the same political points of view (in the opinion of those who contended that there was an attempt to expel them). The systems operator ('sysop' in Internet jargon) was accused of being involved with the attempt to kick them off the BBS. BART produced a lot of text attacking STRIDER's alleged ignorance and attempted to drive a wedge between him and the others, for example in reference #10 BART uses irony to commit a positive face threat. BART to attack STRIDER's group association. The attack on STRIDER was confined to linguistic devices through the use of derisive metaphor and his association with the 'group' was coupled with challenges, via rhetorical questions, to STRIDER's demands to prove the attempt to kick people off the BBS by posting the notes publicly. It was never done and the subject was brought up numerous times.

Reference #11 asserts that the sysop had been involved in the discussions to expel members and had not openly opposed such sentiment. This would constitute a major threat

to negative face since it was assumed by everyone that the sysop had the power to control the BBS in content and its membership[10].

Without saying exactly what the sysop and the others had said, BART constructs his FTA, #12, by "narrating" a series of events and then declares these events to be repulsive to decent people. This corresponds to the face threatening intention wherein the FTA is not made outright and the cumulative effect of the statements is to make an FTA.

BART continues using positive face threats, #13, to attack both STRIDER's presumed group association and STRIDER's perceived value to the group.

'Sysop', #14, refers to the systems operator. The 'sysop' had been in communication with BART in a closed correspondence concerning the affair of the secret notes. The topic "Everyone Except SYSOP" actually existed for awhile. It was supposed to be a protected place where people could blow off steam and not be intimidated by the sysop who controlled the BBS. It has since been placed in the archives and is not open to public scrutiny.

All archives are accessible to the sysop which makes one wonder what the closed topics were used for anyway; if the sysop was playing sides and there was no way that he could be shut out of a topic, then the topic closed to the sysop was hardly a viable reality unless he was a person to honour a promise. However, much of the invective in the BBS was aimed at the sysop because some people believed he could NOT be trusted. There is a great deal in this 'flame war' that did not make sense which is another indication that people caught up in it were often not thinking clearly.

In reference #15 STRIDER is refuting BART's claims that he has been duped. He challenges BART's assertion and (apparently) those who may actually be laughing (it was never made known to me if this was case).

In reference #16 BART makes one of the few FTAs that could possibly be a physical threat (negative FTA), he refers to STRIDER as a 'sawed-off runt'. STRIDER is a slender, non-athletic type and BART was/is a member of the U. S. military (rumour has it that he was in counter-espionage). However, STRIDER related to the author at one time that there was no intimidation inferred. Having met with BART several times face-to-face, he described him as a gentle person whom he felt no reason to believe was capable of violence. There were, in other instances however, vague references to physical threats that were made anonymously in phone calls to members of the BBS but nothing ever came of it.

In the references designated, #17 BART also goes so far as to tell STRIDER how he should feel about being betrayed. There is a constant theme in BART's communications to STRIDER to threaten his common ground or group association (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 103-04, 127-28), a threat to positive face. BART later contends that STRIDER was nothing

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[10] In point of fact, the sysop's authority in the matter was still not well defined when this study was completed, but many members carry on as if the sysop has the ultimate authority to control the BBS

but "a bit player in this whole thing". Yet for all of STRIDER's lack of importance, BART spends an inordinate amount of time deriding him, leading us to conjecture that BART was engaging in the conflict for reasons other than stated. The public nature of this forum may have been a compelling factor.

In reference #18, BART uses the handle 'Dank' (a derisive version of TINMAN's *nom de plume*, to misuse the group name of a group member is a form of FTA toward positive face), another person on the BBS. TINMAN was the president of another organisation that a number of the BBS members were involved with. Four[31] sources outside of that organisation say that BART and DC ROSE were involved in a political dispute over the leadership of that other organisation and that much of the acrimony spilled over into the BBS. There have been two people in the other organisation that have confirmed openly that the dispute and the antagonists were part of the problem in this BBS. This lends some credence to the idea that the participants were using the BBS as an extension of their acrimonious relationships that were initiated outside of the CMC environment. TINMAN,[32] however, reportedly said that DC ROSE and BART were actually very mild mannered people in person. This seems to indicate that the BBS has a different risk factor for BART and DC ROSE.

Reference #19 is to an ambiguous (off record) negative face FTA that carried very real weight. Evidently, the sysop had made some statements about the private notes that were being passed around. The reported assertions (no longer publicly viewable) were that if there was any evidence of 'hacking' then the police should be called in to investigate. This constituted a major threat to negative face for some time during the acrimony. Although there was no police investigation, there was a lot of apprehension evident in the BBS text. Ironically, it is doubtful that the police would have investigated or that laws in the country where this took place would have been specific enough to deal with any hacking as is described in this situation. Hacking is usually an offense against commercial or military property. Many of the participants in this BBS could have investigated this but evidently no one did and this threat was never challenged in an informed manner.

9. Summary of the BART-STRIDER exchange

STRIDER is unobtrusive compared to BART and DC ROSE who carried the dispute into other topics. But all three continuously returned to this particular topic to engage in conflict. The context of this particular topic in this BBS community could be described as conflict for the sake of conflict. In a very real sense, the outright FTAs are part of a desired paradigm, a

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[31] R. Walker, T. Christensen et al. Personal Correspondence

[32] TIMAN, currently residing outside of the country, declined to give his perspective to me for this paper saying he had said all he wanted to say on the subject.

scenario in which some members willingly take part. For this reason, it may be that what would constitute a risk in other contexts has become the norm for this context.

BART used rhetorical questions and irony to deride STRIDER's view of the events and motivation behind the conflict. Constantly referring to the 'obvious facts' he plainly told STRIDER that he was not well informed and not doing a competent job of ascertaining what was really happening. Through irony and BORs, BART denigrated STRIDER's group membership and his inability to see that he was being used--BART told STRIDER numerous times how he should have felt or was feeling. BART attempted to assail STRIDER's privacy by constantly telling him he knew STRIDER's feelings and thoughts--a ploy that is profoundly disturbing if it is believed.

None of these face threatening acts or intentions carried any apparent risk to BART because STRIDER was just another member of the same group and had no power over BART--no ability to retaliate. BART, for that matter, had no power over STRIDER and the exchange was limited to positive face.

10. Politeness strategies that recognise social hierarchy

There is a protocol and a social hierarchy evident in the following introductory comments made by 'OLIO' who has just become a member of another topic on this BBS. These comments are apparently to insure that everyone knows who is reading the topic (it is a closed, invitation only topic run by ANZAC who is the editor of a 'left of centre' magazine) and that the 'new kid' recognises those who are on the topic have the right to know OLIO is there and that OLIO has an invitation to be there. He has chosen a positive politeness strategy in honouring the want to recognise the membership of the others and a negative politeness strategy to honour the right of privacy that the others feel they are entitled to.

His comments are then answered by two other members, FILCH and ILLUSION. FILCH engages in an overt positive politeness strategy by agreeing to a mutual evaluation of the flame wars. ILLUSION, who actually found the flame wars interesting in contradiction to OLIO's belief, engages in a redressive FTA by conceding that it is history and can be taken less seriously now. He then uses humour to foil any lingering feeling of negativeness by making light of the flame wars and asking OLIO to say something controversial--it is all a game so to speak.

268 (of 285) OLIO Feb. 14, 1994 at 23:31 NST (525 characters)

Don't really know how many members "Left Field" has, but figure I should say something initially just to let everyone know I'm here, since it is a private group. So, hello!

ANZAC was nice enough to invite me to join after my recent rant about "family values" in the hot tub. (thanks ANZAC)[33] *Actually, I couldn't say what "left" and "right" mean*

any more, so I don't know how far "left" I am (or am not). But if the point of this group is to have some political discussion sans insulting personal attacks, sounds great to me.[14]

272 (of 309) FILCH Feb. 15, 1994 at 21:05 NST (266 characters)
OLIO #268

>>Actually, I couldn't say what "left" and "right" mean any
>>more

Nor could I. In fact, I'm not a political person at all.
*It just tickles me to know that there's a place on *listserver* where I know I won't have to contend with GYM, ISAMARE or SCRATCH. B-D*[15]

273 (of 309) ILLUSION Feb. 15, 1994 at 23:21 NST (637 characters)
Welcome Olio. Nice to now not be the most recent member. When I joined, the issue of Left and Right, and personal attacks (as some may or may not interpret), all came together in a heated, or at least not lukewarm, debate over so-called political correctness. It was a lot of fun, though those involved or on the side-lines may not have thought so at the time[16]*. Since then, however, it seems to have gotten a bit quite around here. So, you might say something controversial to get us going again. You might start with what sounds like an interesting encounter with ANZAC over "family values". I assume you've met the little one.*

11. Hybrid mixture of strategies

Often the strategies used are those listed by Brown and Levinson as negative. But these strategies are evident when there is no arguable way the speaker can be addressing or threatening the hearer or speaker's freedom of self determination.

In the following excerpt of a much longer entry, DC ROSE is including himself and other members (and STRIDER, the immediate addressee, by default) in the inappropriate behaviour he accepts blame for. This is possibly a redress in the inclusion of the speaker and

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[13] 'in the hot tub' is another topic on the BBS.

[14] This last is a comment on the 'flame wars'.

[15] Other participants in the flame wars; B-D are BART and DC ROSE

[16] Illusion's remarks are one of the few made that indicate some people may look back on the flame wars with a little longing. STRIDER, once in a conversation with the author, made an off-hand remark to the effect that things were not quite as interesting as they once were.

the audiénce but the act is more easily understood as a sarcastic 'apology' because it lacks a certain 'felicity': the speaker is belittling the audience by apologising for behaving like them and in this may not be very sincere since he is spreading blame rather than accepting complete responsibility. This violates the Maxim of Quality in that it lacks sincerity. DC ROSE also forces his point home by overstating the magnitude of the behaviour with extreme modifiers: *despicable, vilification, heap abuse.* This is a negative politeness strategy which also seems to lack sincerity. The speaker also promises in strong wording not to commit the same act again--a positive FTA directed toward the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 125). So there is sarcasm--an off record strategy of ambiguity (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 212, 220 & 248), apology--a negative politeness strategy and a positive face threatening act directed toward the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 125 &187), understatement--a negative politeness strategy that violates the Maxim of Quantity (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 217-18), and shared responsibility--a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 127), all of which spreads the FTAs over the speaker and the audience.

The speaker's apology is also complicated in that it does not communicate the desire to avoid impinging upon the audience' faces yet the wording evinces the linguistic construct of an apology. DC ROSE's comments are akin to negative politeness in that they are very specific and address only the behaviour that he deems inappropriate (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 129).

> 28 (of 290) Modified by DC ROSE June 19, 1993 at 11:53 NST (7415 characters)
> *I accept the blame for allowing them to goad me into acting like them. No matter how despicable their conduct--and it *was* despicable--I should have refused to be goaded. I made a decision to begin returning their vilification in kind, and that's nobody's fault but my own. I plan to exert myself to the utmost to prevent that happening again.*

In the final analysis, it may be argued that this is DC ROSE's style of Bald On Record and that there is in fact no redress. Brown and Levinson point out that context can make an off-record strategy an on-record FTA (1987, p. 212-13). A further investigation of this topic, another topic and enquiries regarding a topic that DC ROSE moderated specifically to engage in contentious political discussion reveals that DC ROSE's style was always very wordy, sarcastic and full of metaphors. DC ROSE used indirect speech in a very direct way, as it were. This 'skilled' use of words is a persistent ploy of some of the interactants in a game of 'one-upmanshipping'.

This style of discourse was shared among many of the members of this listserver, indicating that it was something of a contest for some to see how indirect and sarcastic they

could be (compare ILLUSION's comments to those of FILCH in the entry above)

CONCLUSION

There seem to be three basic perspectives on the acrimony or aggression found in CMC. The first is that it is a result of the complications of the medium that confound the normal process of response to verbal and non-verbal signals--signals that give the interactants the ability to adjust to the situation. The second is that there are people who are inclined to acrimony and the third, which I endorse, that it is a combination of the two.

The study by Smilowitz et al. (1988) reflects some of the attributes of discourse found in this study. But those attributes seemed to be specific to some people and not others, an observation made by STRIDER--most people eventually adjust, especially with a little outside contact to reaffirm the humanity of the participants, as it were. COMLINK and ANZAC and TWADDLE all made similar comments to this effect, indicating that the phenomenon was readily interpreted in this way by the participants.

By the time this paper was written, the BBS/listserver members had settled into a routine (if that is not assuming too much) wherein they were very careful not to transgress the rules of politeness that seemed common to the interactants (cf. the interaction between OLIO, FILCH and ILLUSION). Most of the discourse now would seem to be very face oriented in the sense there is a great deal of care manifest by recourse to linguistic strategies to compensate for the missing clues normally provided by prosody and kinesics. FTAs are very unusual rather than a common feature.

In this it would seem that the hypothesis offered earlier is accurate in the sense that the participants are cognisant of parameters of context such as those delineated by Lyons (1977) and Ochs (1979)--it merely takes time to establish their approximates in the 'faceless medium' of CMC

Like the study conducted by Smilowitz et al. (1988) however, the author observed a kind of independence from peer pressure, in some respects, that would seem consistent with the observations of Sussman, Golden and Beauclair (1991). This independence seemed to establish a sense of equality among the participants once the flame war crisis was over and the perceived threat to negative face was diminished. The threat may have been diminished by the introduction of the vast amount of freedom made available through the introduction of the Internet connexion, the tremendous upsurge in the number of members and the expulsion of the two most outspoken members, BART and DC ROSE. This last point would appear to reflect the observation by Allen (1993) that there may be the need for a central authority on a BBS, especially in the event of a crisis.

It is my opinion that Sussman, Golden and Beauclair's view (1991)--that the hierarchy is abolished--is too strong to describe the situation in this BBS/listserver. Also, there was arguably a vestigial or primitive hierarchy in the study done by Allen (1993) which

developed and became evident when the social protocol normally expected in communication was transgressed. In fact, it may be that in this study and in Allen's study, the hierarchy simply took longer to establish and social roles from the environment outside were approximated within the BBS community. This may constitute evidence that some people will, for whatever reason, bring their perspective of social roles into the 'faceless' medium.

These roles may be better described as 'altered' rather than 'abolished'. This was also apparent from Sussman, Golden and Beauclair (1991) who made note of the negative reaction some members of the university community in the study had to the lack of hierarchy. What the end result of that experience was, however, was not noted in the Sussman et al. paper--a detail that robs us of an informed comparison.

The implications are that, given time, CMC discourse will show a greater use of positive face strategies as people adjust to their 'faceless voices' and attempt to reduce the acrimony they encounter. This would also be true of CMC within an existing social structure wherein the participants have actual contact. This study focused upon a CMC community that was not purely 'faceless' since the participants reacted socially outside of the cyberspace environment. An investigation into a totally faceless community in the international Internet communities may give further support to this hypothesis.

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